Nietzsche and his whip

by Franz Krojer (Munich 2026, Differenz-Verlag)

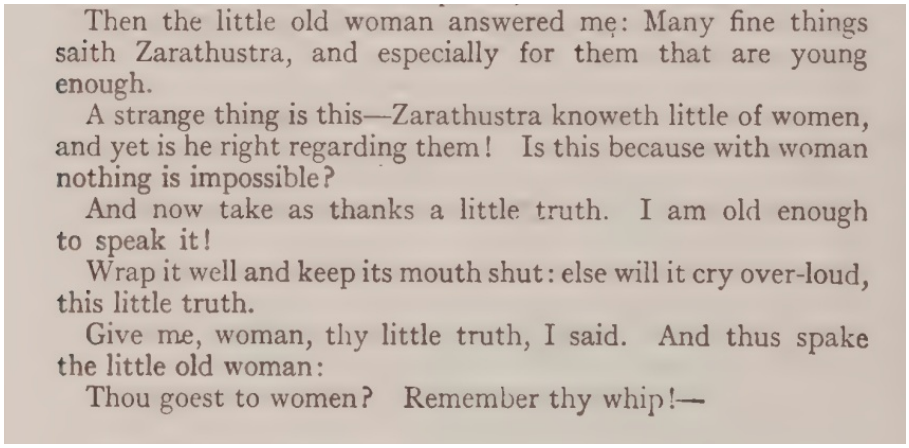
The quote

The most famous and notorious Nietzsche quote goes something like this:

> When you go to women, don't forget your whip!

What this means is that he was a libertine, a sexual tyrant.

It comes from his 'Zarathustra' and reads more precisely (and in context, Tille-Bozman):



Then the little old woman answered me: Many fine things saith Zarathustra, and especially for them that are young enough.

A strange thing is this—Zarathustra knoweth little of women, and yet is he right regarding them! Is this because with woman nothing is impossible?

And now take as thanks a little truth. I am old enough to speak it!

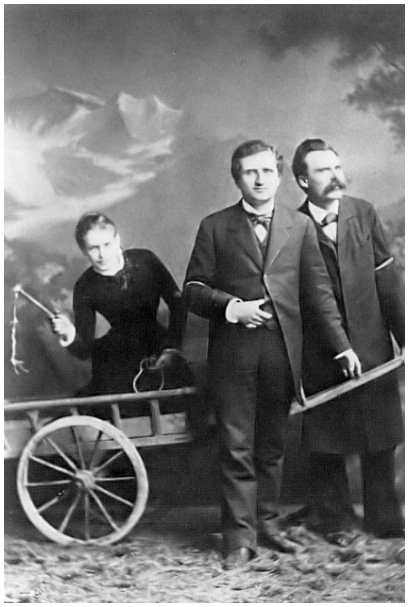
Wrap it well and keep its mouth shut: else will it cry over-loud, this little truth.

Give me, woman, thy little truth, I said. And thus spake the little old woman:

Thou goest to women? Remember thy whip!—

A picture

1882 in the studio, Nietzsche with Paul Rée and Lou Salomé:



When I first saw this photo, I assumed that Nietzsche was referring to the passage in his Zarathustra. So it was just a harmless joke. It only would have been bad for Nietzsche's reputation if he had been sitting on the carriage with the whip and two women in front.

A better interpretation

Namely, from Nietzsche himself:

> Do not forget the whip! In the manner, how and what you honour, you always create a distance around yourself.
> Vergiß die Peitsche nicht! In der Art, wie und was man ehrt, zieht man immer eine Distanz um sich.
> (NF-1882,3[1] — Posthumous Fragments, Summer–Autumn 1882.)

So no coercion after all.